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SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KMDR](#) [IR](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: OMAN/IRAN: SULTAN'S VISIT ANNOUNCED

REF: MUSCAT 823

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: As discussed reftel, Sultan Qaboos's deferred visit to Iran is under way. The trip has now been announced in local and regional media. In the Omani media, coverage is cautious and generic, focusing on how the visit reinforces the Sultanate's steadfast policy of cordiality with all its neighbors. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Word of the visit first appeared on Monday, August 3 in London-based "Al Sharq Al Awsat." On Tuesday, August 4, all seven Omani dailies front-paged the story, all using standard (officially supplied) language highlighting the visit's place in "His Majesty's policy of good neighbourliness and relations between the Omani and Iranian peoples and all peoples of the region," and noting that the Sultan and Ahmedinejad would "discuss issues of concern for both sides in the light of regional and national developments." State news agency ONA's official statement calls the countries' bilateral relationship "exemplary," saying both nations "act from a profound belief that constructive dialogue among nations ... achieves mutual interests, peace, security, and stability." It adds that the two countries' ties are based on "mutual respect, non interference in others' internal affairs and fruitful cooperation in various fields."

¶3. (U) Iranian agencies (but not the Omani press) mention other meetings, with ISNA noting that the Sultan will be welcomed by Foreign Minister Mottaki (who discussed the visit with the press in Tehran on August 3) and Farsnews adding that the itinerary will include meetings with "a number of senior Iranian officials" including Supreme Leader Khamenei. Outside the region, to date only AFP has picked up the story, and only its coverage has placed the royal visit in the context of the aftermath of Iran's elections and the inauguration scheduled for August 5.

¶4. (U) In public statements, both FM Mottaki and the Omani ambassador in Tehran emphasized the visit's role in promoting Omani-Iranian ties in light of positive relations among Iran and all the GCC nations. Mottaki was fulsome in praise of the Sultan's "wisdom...experience and expertise", while, speaking to the Iranian press, Ambassador Yahiya al-Oraimi called the trip "a jump towards prosperity in Iran-Oman relations in all the political, economic and cultural fields."

¶5. (U) Initial Omani reaction has been muted, with posters on the popular Al-Sablah 2 Internet forum (omania2.net) wondering at the visit's timing, what U.S. thinking about it might be, and whether it might lead to negative portrayals of the Sultanate in U.S. media.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: As expected, Oman is carefully packaging this visit within larger themes of Omani "neighbourliness" and international friendship. Initial coverage has closely followed models set by previous official visits, neither underplaying this one's significance nor giving any indication that, despite being the first in some 35 years, it has any special import beyond the maintenance of "friendly and historic" ties. END COMMENT.  
HURTADO